

Sexual Violence: A Serious Public Health Problem Fact Sheet

Sexual violence is a public health problem because:

- It causes or contributes to many physical and mental health problems, including but not limited to: physical injuries and disability, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, gynecological problems, chronic pain, eating disorders, depression, fear and anger, post-traumatic stress syndrome, stress, and suicide¹.
- It is linked to other negative health behaviors—victims and perpetrators of sexual violence are more likely to abuse substances, be affected by chronic disease, and/or engage in risky sexual behavior than the general population².
- Data shows that sexual violence affects a significant portion of the population (see enclosed fact sheet “Indiana Sexual Violence Data”);
- **Sexual violence has a negative effect on the social health and well-being of society.** Sexual violence creates a culture of disrespect and inequality and threatens the safety and productivity of youth and families.
- The public health approach to solving problems is effective in addressing violence prevention in general and sexual violence in particular³.
 - The public health approach to problems draws from many different disciplines, including medicine, epidemiology, sociology, criminology, psychology, and policy. This has allowed the field to respond to a wide range of diseases, and injuries around the world, including violence.
 - The public health approach stresses joint efforts of different sectors such as health care, education, social service, justice, and policy to solve problems.
 - The Center for Disease Control actively promotes a public health approach to sexual violence prevention. CDC emphasizes “primary prevention”—that is, being proactive and using “approaches that take place before sexual violence has occurred to prevent initial perpetration or victimization”⁴. **Primary prevention of sexual violence requires a public health approach, and it is for that reason public health leaders should be engaged in community efforts.**

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/images/SV%20Factsheet.pdf>

² <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/SV/svp-consequences.htm>

³ World Report on Violence and Health, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2002

⁴ CDC. “Sexual Violence Prevention: Beginning the Dialogue”. 2004